

# The **Eastern Africa**

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## Weekly Influential Bulletin (WIB)

**Monday 17<sup>th</sup> - Friday 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2026**

### THEME:

#### **El Niño and Eastern Africa's Resilience to Interconnected Human, Economic, Health and Security Risks**

This week's Influential Bulletin examines how Eastern Africa can strengthen resilience to El Niño through anticipatory governance, regional cooperation and integrated preparedness. Across food security, regional coordination, transnational organized crime, health infrastructure and disaster governance, evidence demonstrates that El Niño can generate interconnected humanitarian, economic, health and security risks that transcend national borders. Technology, early warning systems, regional information sharing and digital tools can strengthen preparedness, but their effectiveness depends on institutions capable of converting information into timely action. The Bulletin therefore highlights the importance of resilient infrastructure, predictable anticipatory financing, interoperable data and surveillance systems, stronger EAC and IGAD coordination, and community-centred preparedness. It also underscores the need to protect humanitarian operations and critical systems from criminal exploitation during emergencies. Collectively, the analysis call for Eastern Africa to shift from reactive crisis management towards coordinated, risk informed governance that anticipates cascading El Niño impacts and protects lives, livelihoods, infrastructure and economic stability.

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## Leveraging Technology to Strengthen El Niño Preparedness and Food Security in Eastern Africa

Technology can help Eastern Africa move from reacting to El Niño shocks to anticipating and managing them before they become humanitarian and economic crises. The region is already facing significant food insecurity, with 48.5 million people requiring humanitarian assistance and more than 40 million experiencing acute food insecurity. El Niño-related floods, droughts, heat, crop losses, livestock deaths, and market disruptions could place additional pressure on households and food systems.

Early warning systems are central to reducing these risks. Governments can combine predictive weather models, satellite imagery, remote sensing, and ground-based observations to identify emerging threats and provide timely information to farmers, pastoralists, traders, and local authorities. However, early warnings are most valuable when they lead to early action. Forecasts should therefore be connected to clear response protocols that trigger agricultural advisories, flood preparedness measures, livestock protection, emergency financing, and the pre-positioning of essential supplies.

Technology can also strengthen agricultural policy and food security planning by providing governments with timely, reliable data on evolving production conditions. Platforms such as the Group on Earth Observations Global Agricultural Monitoring (GEOGLAM) can support the use of crop-monitoring data to assess production prospects and anticipate shortages. This information can guide maize import decisions, strategic grain reserve releases, and the distribution of drought- and flood-resistant seeds. Better data can help governments avoid delayed interventions that often increase costs and leave vulnerable communities with fewer options.

Digital financial tools provide another avenue for strengthening resilience. Expanding digital payments can allow governments, humanitarian agencies, and development partners to deliver assistance quickly to affected households, including farmers, and pastoralists whose livelihoods may be disrupted. Flexible financing is equally important because resources must be available when forecasts indicate that intervention is needed, rather than only after damage has occurred.



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Regional cooperation will determine how effectively these technologies translate into protection. Climate risks do not stop at national borders, while food markets, river systems, livestock movements, and supply chains connect countries across Eastern Africa. Governments and regional institutions should therefore strengthen data-sharing, align early action protocols, and coordinate contingency planning. Partnerships with technology companies, research institutions, financial providers, and huma-

nitarian organisations can further expand access to tools and expertise.

By linking innovation with anticipatory governance, regional cooperation, and flexible financing, Eastern Africa can strengthen its capacity to withstand El Niño shocks and protect food security. This approach can also reduce pressure on humanitarian systems by limiting avoidable losses and enabling recovery to begin earlier after extreme weather events.

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## Regional Cooperation Critical to El Niño Risk Management in Eastern Africa

Regional cooperation is essential to managing the interconnected risks that El Niño can create across Eastern Africa. Its effects transcend national borders. Heavy rainfall in one country can affect downstream communities, transport corridors, food markets, livestock movements, and disease patterns in another. At the same time, drought and flooding can occur simultaneously across different parts of the region, placing uneven pressure on national response capacities. These interconnected risks require governments to move beyond isolated national

responses and strengthen mechanisms for collective action.

Regional coordination can help governments anticipate these pressures and identify where assistance, supplies, and technical capacity are likely to be needed. Regional Economic Communities, meteorological agencies, disaster management authorities, humanitarian organisations, and development partners should therefore establish stronger channels for sharing climate information, risk assessments, and early warnings.



Photo Credit: UNDRR

Institutions such as the IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC), the Africa Centre for Disaster Risk Management, and the Africa Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction can play an important role in connecting scientific information with policy decisions. Their regional platforms can help countries interpret forecasts, assess potential impacts, and coordinate preparedness measures. However, information alone will not reduce risk unless it reaches decision-makers and communities in a form that is timely, accessible, and relevant to local conditions.

Countries should use regional mechanisms to distinguish between shared risks and country-specific vulnerabilities. This can support more targeted planning while encouraging governments to exchange practical lessons from previous droughts, floods, and other climate-related emergencies. Regional platforms can also facilitate joint resource mobilisation, helping countries access financing, equipment, technical expertise, and emergency supplies before impacts intensify.

Cross-border disaster response requires particular attention. Floods, disease outbreaks, displacement, and disruptions to transport networks can quickly create

challenges that exceed the capacity of individual governments. Pre-agreed arrangements for sharing personnel, equipment, medical supplies, and other resources could reduce delays during emergencies. Coordinated approaches can also improve the management of communities and livelihoods that depend on cross-border movement.

Communication with communities must remain central to regional cooperation. Forecasts and technical assessments should be translated into clear, actionable messages that farmers, pastoralists, local authorities, businesses, and households can use. Strengthening communication channels can help communities understand likely hazards and take protective measures before impacts escalate.

In conclusion, effective El Niño risk management depends on converting regional knowledge into coordinated action. Stronger cooperation can close information gaps, improve resource allocation, and strengthen cross-border response capacity. By linking forecasting, planning, financing, and community-level action, Eastern African countries can better manage El Niño's cascading effects and protect lives, livelihoods, and critical infrastructure.

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## Preventing Transnational Organised Crime from Exploiting El Niño Vulnerabilities in Eastern Africa

El Niño-related disruptions could create new opportunities for Transnational Organised Crime (TOC) networks to exploit vulnerabilities across Eastern Africa. Floods, storms, droughts, displacement, and damage to critical infrastructure can stretch state institutions and divert security resources towards immediate humanitarian needs. Where authorities struggle to maintain oversight, criminal networks can exploit

weakened controls, target vulnerable populations, and expand illicit markets.

Human trafficking is a particular concern during disasters. Displacement and loss of livelihoods can leave people, especially women and children, more exposed to exploitation, forced labour, and trafficking. Criminal groups may also exploit disrupted transport routes and weakened border controls to

move people, arms, and other illicit goods. At the same time, shortages caused by damaged supply chains can increase demand for counterfeit or substandard products, creating opportunities for criminal actors to infiltrate legitimate markets.

Humanitarian operations can face similar risks. The February 2026 attack on a World Food Programme convoy in South Sudan carrying more than 1,500 metric tonnes of food demonstrates the security challenges surrounding the delivery of assistance during crises. As emergency operations expand, criminal networks may seek to divert relief supplies, manipulate distribution systems, or extort communities and aid providers. Such activities not only cause financial losses but can also prevent assistance from reaching populations most in need.

Cyber-enabled crime presents another emerging threat. As governments and humanitarian organisations increasingly rely on digital platforms for cash transfers, registration, logistics, and public communication, criminal groups may use phishing, identity theft, and other forms of fraud to exploit these systems. Disasters can make such attacks particularly damaging because institutions may have limited capacity to verify transactions or investigate suspicious activity.

Addressing these risks requires security cooperation to be integrated into regional disaster management. Eastern African states should strengthen intelligence sharing and establish mechanisms for rapid information exchange during major climate-related emergencies. Joint law-enforcement operations can help disrupt trafficking networks that operate across borders, while harmonised legal frameworks can reduce jurisdictional gaps that criminals exploit.

Border management should also become more responsive during periods of displacement and disrupted transport. This requires stronger screening and information systems without restricting legitimate humanitarian movement. Authorities should simultaneously strengthen measures against illicit financial flows by monitoring suspicious transactions, tracing criminal proceeds, and pursuing the recovery of assets linked to organised crime.

Regional and international institutions, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, can support governments through technical assistance, training, intelligence cooperation, and policy development. Integrating these efforts into El Niño contingency planning would help states anticipate criminal exploitation rather than respond after networks have already expanded.



## Strengthening Regional Health Infrastructure to Enhance Eastern Africa's Preparedness and Response to El Niño

Eastern Africa needs stronger and more climate-resilient health infrastructure to manage the health consequences of El Niño. Heavy rainfall, prolonged dry conditions, flooding, displacement, and environmental damage can disrupt health services while increasing exposure to waterborne and vector-borne diseases. These pressures can overwhelm facilities that already face shortages of personnel, medicines, equipment, and emergency resources. Strengthening health infrastructure should therefore be treated as a regional resilience priority rather than a response limited to individual countries.

Governments should invest in facilities capable of remaining operational during extreme weather events. This includes protecting health centres from flooding, improving water and sanitation systems, strengthening backup power and storage capacity, and ensuring reliable supply routes for essential medicines. Health facilities in border and disaster-prone areas require particular attention because they may

experience sudden increases in demand when communities are displaced or when access to neighbouring facilities becomes necessary.

Effective preparedness also depends on stronger public health stewardship and coordination. National authorities should align contingency plans with regional priorities and establish mechanisms for sharing epidemiological information across borders. Fragmented disease surveillance can delay the identification of outbreaks and hinder coordinated responses. Interoperable surveillance systems would allow health authorities to exchange timely information on emerging disease patterns, population movements, and pressure on health services, enabling earlier intervention.

Regional cooperation should also address weaknesses in emergency financing and medical supply chains. El Niño-related emergencies can rapidly increase demand for vaccines, diagnostic equipment, medicines, and protective supplies. Expanding



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African health manufacturing can reduce dependence on distant suppliers and improve the region's ability to respond to sudden shortages. Joint procurement and regional stockpiling could further improve access to essential commodities while reducing delays during emergencies.

Digital health solutions can complement these investments. Mobile reporting platforms, telemedicine, digital disease surveillance, and geospatial tools can help authorities monitor vulnerable areas and maintain access to services when physical infrastructure is disrupted. Such systems should be designed for use in settings with limited connectivity and integrated into existing national health structures rather than operating as isolated projects.

Partnerships with organisations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Doctors Without Borders, and the Red Cross can strengthen community mobilisation, risk communication, disease monitoring, and emergency outreach. Their support can be particularly valuable in reaching displaced populations, children, pastoral communities, and other groups facing barriers to healthcare. Regional health resilience therefore requires sustained investment in infrastructure, surveillance, manufacturing, financing, and cross-border coordination. By connecting these systems before an El Niño event occurs, Eastern African states can reduce disruptions to essential health services, detect outbreaks earlier, and respond more effectively when crises emerge.

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## Building Resilient Disaster Governance Systems for El Niño Response in Eastern Africa

Strengthening disaster governance systems in Eastern Africa will help prioritize prevention, preparedness and early action to reduce El Niño risks and associated human and economic costs. Current regional forecasts underscore the need for governments to strengthen preparedness before climate impacts escalate, particularly given the potential implications for food security, livelihoods, infrastructure, public health and fiscal stability. El Niño impacts are not uniform across Eastern Africa, making coordinated, evidence-based, and location-specific preparedness essential.

The EAC Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Bill, passed by the East African Legislative Assembly in 2016 but still awaiting assent by EAC Heads of State, provides an important regional legal foundation. The Sendai Framework for

Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 to 2030, IGAD disaster risk management mechanisms, and the Africa Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction further support regional action. However, the existence of regional frameworks alone does not guarantee effective disaster preparedness. Persistent gaps in implementation, institutional coordination, risk financing, data sharing, and translating early warnings into timely action can increase the human and economic costs of climate-related disasters.

EAC Partner States should therefore fast-track assent to the EAC Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Bill and strengthen national and local disaster management institutions. Regional authorities should improve cross-border risk information sharing and establish interoperable early warning systems that connect meteorological fore-

casts with clear institutional responsibilities. Predictable anticipatory financing is equally important, enabling governments and humanitarian actors to release resources before impacts intensify rather than waiting for disasters to occur. Financing mechanisms should be linked to agreed risk thresholds and predefined response actions.

Community participation should remain central to disaster governance. Local communities possess knowledge of environmental changes, historical risks, and coping strategies that can complement scientific forecasting. Governments should strengthen community-based preparedness, en-

sure warnings are communicated through accessible channels and enable vulnerable populations to act on forecasts before hazards escalate.

Ultimately, Eastern Africa should move from reactive disaster response towards institutionalized anticipatory governance. This requires converting reliable climate information into coordinated decisions, pre-arranged financing and locally informed action. Strengthened regional cooperation can ensure that early warnings trigger timely interventions, reducing disruption to livelihoods, protecting critical infrastructure and limiting the wider economic costs of El Niño.



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